Sport and the Mass Media:
Impact and Issues

KIN 251
Dr. Matthew A. Masucci

Sport and the Media
• Institutions that are not separate
• Commercial industries
• Two of the most lucrative businesses in North America
• Focused on Economic profit

Media and Power
The media often serve the interests of those with power and wealth in society
As corporate control of media has increased & become more concentrated, media content emphasizes the following as natural and necessary in society:
• Consumerism
• Individualism
• Competition
• Class inequality

Global/Corporate Media Influence
• While there are over 25,000 media outlets - less than 30 companies control approximately 50% of the media industry.
• Media Giant’s Holdings

Exceptionally Sophisticated!
• Use sophisticated qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to zero in on target demographics...

Social Roles of the Mass Media
• Mass Media
  • “All of the technically organized means of communication that reach large numbers of diverse people quickly and efficiently” (Eitzen & Sage, 2003, p. 237)
  • Print Media
    Newspapers, Magazines, & Books
  • Electronic Media
    Radio, Television, movies, & the Internet
Prominent & Subtle Roles of the Media

Prominent Roles:
- Communication of Information
- Entertainment for Consumer World

Subtle Roles:
- Social Integration
  - Promotes shared values & norms
  - Messages and images help to shape the cultural atmosphere
- Social Change
  - Present cutting edge research
  - Report "new ideas" thus promote changes oftentimes

The Symbiosis of Mass Media & Sport

4 Roles of Mass Media are sustained through sport
- Information: results & stats
- Entertainment: "escape reality" temporarily
- Social Integration: creates a ‘communal’ focus that binds society
- Social Change: create, change, and promote the popularity of certain sports

Links Between Mass Media & Sport

Newspapers:
- Mid 19th century began periodic coverage of sport
- By 1890’s sports section was a regular feature
- Today, almost 50% of some papers devoted to sport and the sports pages have 5X the number of readers of any other section

Magazines
- First magazines were focused on "outdoor" activities – hunting, fishing, horse racing.
- 1830, 1st sport journal: *Spirit of the Times* 1886 – *The Sporting News*
- Can differentiate based on sport
- *Sports Illustrated* (1954) 3.5 million copies weekly
- ½ the space at any newsstand is for sport related magazines

Books
- Many books on boxing, horse racing, & field sports appeared in the late 19th c.
- Increasingly, "serious" writers began to explore sporting themes
- Even a journal of Sport Literature!
- Former athletes and sport journalists making big impact (form kiss-and tell, to expose books)

Radio
- Electronic media of all types have made dramatic inroads into sport
- KDKA went on the air in 1920 and in 1921 broadcast heavyweight championship fight
- With TV, radios dominance subsided in the 1950’s
- Still: 700,000 hours of sports
- Call-in shows, play-by-play, interviews...
- Increasing number of "all-sport" radio shows
Links Between Mass Media & Sport

- **Motion Pictures**
  - Sport has been a compelling focus for motion pictures since the 1970’s
  - ESPN.com - Top 20 Sports Movies of All-Time
  - Some sport movies are moving beyond mere entertainment and exploring larger social issues like race, gender and power

Trends in Televised Sports

- Rights fees have escalated rapidly since the 1960s
- Sports programming has increased dramatically
- As more events are covered, ratings for particular events have decreased
  - Audience fragmentation has occurred
- Television companies use sports events to promote other programming
- Television companies increasingly own teams and events

**Table 12.1: Escalating sports media rights fees for major commercial sports in the United States (in millions of dollars)**

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<tr>
<td>NFL</td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
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<td>NASCAR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>294</td>
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**Notes:**
- Fees are not inflation-adjusted. Fees from 1984 data.
- Fees are for broadcast rights only, no cable, no satellite, no syndication.
- Includes U.S. and Canadian data.

**Figure 12.1:**

**A. U.S. broadcast rights for the summer Olympics**

**Figure 12.2:**

**B. U.S. broadcast rights for the winter Olympics**

Links Between Mass Media & Sport

- **Television:**
  - Predominant presenter of sport
  - 1950 – less than 10%; by 2001 98% of USA households had TV’s
  - By 2000 average viewer received 55 channels
  - North Americans own more than 240 million TV sets – over 1/3 of the world’s total!!
### Economic Aspects of Televised Sport
- **Huge economic impact of TV sport**
- **Money is the driving force behind the “TV-sport machine”** (p. 242)

#### How does it work?
TV networks pay $ for broadcast rights to show a pro or college league’s games. The networks hope to get that $ back + a profit (hey, it’s a business!). They sell advertising time to corporations like GM for the games. Administrators of the sports leagues take the $ from the networks and distributes it according to their policies. The TV industry is essentially a broker bringing together sellers (leagues) and buyers (advertisers) and consumers (fans). It is purposeful and it is with the sole intent to turn a profit! (p. 242-243)

### Television’s Influence on Sport
- **Increases in Sport Revenue**
  - New teams, huge profits & player salaries, many sports teams are owned by media companies
  - Media coverage is promotional (ESPN). Lots of free publicity
  - Popularity Shifts
  - TV boosts popularity of some sports. What sports are more TV friendly? Does the ‘televise-ability’ of a sport matter?
- **Professional Sport Franchise locations and the Media**
  - TV markets often dictate expansion and team relocation. Many sports “die” w/out coverage

### Television: The Monster of the Sports World
- **First TV broadcast:** 1939 Basketball, Columbia v. Princeton
- **At first technological limitations made TV and sport incompatible**
- **North American households watch TV more than 8 hours a day!**
- **Dominating influence in our social lives**
- **There is an expansion of sports coverage**
  - Super bowl dominates TV ratings (up to 47% of the households watching TV)
  - 6 billion watched some coverage of the 2000 Olympics
  - PPV is becoming more prominent

### More Examples...
- **TV rights for NFL games from 1998-2006 (+ the 1997 Super Bowl) = 17.6 billion! 65% on all NFL revenue comes from TV rights**
- **National TV & Radio rights to MLB sold to NBC, Fox, FSN, and ESPN for 4.2 billion. Each team gets 13 million /year from contracts**
- **In 1999, CBS signed a broadcast contract (2003-2014) with the NCAA for 6.2 billion for D1 Men’s Basketball Tourney (a 252% increase)**
- **A 30 second ad spot in the Super Bowl rose from $75,000 in 1971 to $1.9 million in 2002**

### Television’s Influence on Sport
- **Intercollegiate Sport**
  - **NOT amateur!** Some teams seem to get more ‘coverage’ than others.
  - Big-time programs can’t exist w/out TV. NCAA lost court decision to negotiate exclusive rights for football.
  - NCAA Tourney: More teams, more money.
  - So what? Most programs run a deficit and it would be MUCH bigger w/out TV money
  - Basketball provides 80% of the NCAA’s total revenue!
  - Often, other sports (women’s & men’s) get shortchanged

### Television’s Influence on Sport
- **High School Sport**
  - Even high school games are increasingly televised.
  - National championships – good or bad?
  - Athletes are picking certain universities because of TV coverage
Television’s Influence on Sport

Modifying sport to Accommodate TV

Many changes to enhance appeal or accommodate programming needs:
- NFL: Moving hash marks & kickoff spot, TV timeouts, liberalized offensive holding
- NBA: Shot clock, slam dunk, three-point shot, more physical game
- Golf: Match play replaces medal play, skins games
- Tennis: Tie-breaker system for sets tied at 6 games all
- MLB: Designated hitter, lowered strike zone, night games for world series, livelier ball?
- Sudden death tie-breaking rules in many sports, extended play-off system
- Many Olympic events rescheduled to air in USA primetime slots

Buffalo Sabers Rochester farm team experimenting with “blue ice.”

Goaltender Ryan Miller says: “Any kind of change would help... If they feel like people aren’t able to watch or follow on TV, we should make it more television-friendly.”

Television’s Influence on Sport

TV’s Own Sports

Made for TV sports:
- World’s Strongest Man & Woman
- Battle of the Network Stars
- Gladiators
- X-Games
- XFL...

Television’s Influence on Sport

Televised Sport as a Mediated Event

- Form and content altered to suit media interests
- Is the event an objective “mirror of reality”? Scripts, camera angles, music, stats, zoom & slow-motion, etc
- Sportscasters “hype” interest in the product but they can help to frame the reality of the event for the viewer
- Reveal and conceal becomes the “event”
- Viewers only see a particular event – carefully chosen elements
- Have to lure fans – with certain events and personalities etc
- Hook listeners or viewers – create drama!!

The Impact of Sport on the Mass Media

Increased sport in the media
- Not just relegated to the sports page – headline news
- Sport’s Privileged Treatment by Media
- Sport Consumers and the Mass Market
  - Sports sells product
  - Internet – wide-open market: gambling, fantasy leagues, helps to promote multibillion dollar industry

The Impact of Sport on the Mass Media

Reproduction of “hegemonic masculinity” in media sport
- Sends messages about gender expectations
- Prominent site for messages about masculinity particularly (violence, pain, sexism)
- Sports Illustrated Covers
The Impact of Sport on the Mass Media

Media Sport and Gender Inequality
- 40% of women participate, yet only 8% of the coverage feature women
- Salary disparities coaches and athletes
- Gender Bias – even broadcasters tend to diminish women’s sport accomplishments (NCAA Basketball Tourney)

Media Sport & Racial and Ethnic Inequalities:
- History of racism and segregation in the USA – this applies to sport as well.
- Subtle and not so subtle stereotyping often accompanies the discourse surrounding athletes of color.
- “naturally gifted athlete” v. “field general”
- Overwhelming focus on non-white athlete’s thuggish and violent behavior yet equal time is rarely given when white athletes perpetuate similar actions
- Native American stereotypes perpetuated via team names
- Asian American and Latino athletes often not focused on at all or stereotyped based on ethnicity

To Conclude…
- Media and Sport have an intimate relationship based, primarily, on profit
- Sports are mediated significantly by media in order to preserve the lucrative arrangement
- Hyper critical (journalistic) voices are often silenced
- Sport journalism is still a relatively homogeneous group
- Male dominance of the “sport world” is reinforced daily through the media
- Often, “sportscaster” are not journalists at all, but rather entertainers or former athletes with no “news” training – thus blurring the lines of entertainment and news

Research in Sport & Media
- Qualitative research uses several methodological frameworks.
- For Example (Plymire, 2005)
  - 3 prominent “avenues of research” (p. 143):
    1. Studies of media production (few studies)
    2. Studies of audience response to media content (relatively few)
    3. Studies of media texts (majority)

Current Project:

Past Sport Media Projects

Doping the discourse:
A critical media analysis of the centennial Tour de France

Matthew A. Masucci
Ted M. Butryn
San José State University
NASSS 2003
Purpose
- To critically examine the Outdoor Life Network’s coverage of the 2003 Centennial Tour de France
- Specifically to interrogate how the OLN commentary frames the issues of doping, national identity, Lance’s “drive for five”

Methodology
- Outdoor Life Network TdF coverage (@ 55 hours) taped and subjected to critical analysis (Birrell & McDonald, 2000)
- Additional sources included Velonews, Cyclingnews, Eurosport, & L’Equipe websites
- Researchers took notes on coverage & regularly discussed what was broadcast
- Quantitative data preliminary at this point
- Coverage analyzed with three overarching thematic narratives in mind
  - In line with media’s overall framing & marketing of event

Media, narrative, and the Tour de France
- Media as primary constructor & framer of the ‘drama’
- Evolution of American TdF coverage
- Currently, OLN is THE narrative, yet the presumption of journalistic objectivity is alluded to.
  - However, irony is that they are subject to French video feed
  - Further, ALL of the characters that frame the OLN coverage are major stakeholders!

“History”, Culture, Myth and Media: The 1919 Chicago Black Sox and the Construction of American Dreams
Matthew A. Masucci
San Jose State University

The Identity Wars
Media Representation of Italian/Americans and the Intricate Negotiation of Identity
A Presentation by: Matthew A. Masucci

From Blood Sport to Brand Name: The Turbulent History of The Ultimate Fighting Championship
1993 – 2006
Matthew A. Masucci & Ted M. Butryn
San José State University
Beyond the Octagon: The Ascension of Ultimate Fighting

Matthew A. Masucci
San José State University